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SUBJECT: MEDIA PLAY: KADIRGAMAR COVERAGE: LONG ON
HEADLINES, SHORT ON EDITORIAL COMMENT

11. Summary. When Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar visited Washington in mid-May, press coverage in Sri Lanka was long on headlines, short on editorial comment. Newspapers and broadcasters, both English and vernacular, gave extensive coverage to the visit, starting on 5/13 and moving through the weekend. Most headlines were anodyne, although Kadirgamar was occasionally caught making misstatements regarding the Millennium Challenge Account or commenting on the LTTE in ways that appeared to deviate from GOSL policy. Curiously, only three newspapers commented editorially on the FM's visit. A government-owned English daily said that the FM had received a "Morale-booster from US." Under "Chaos in a country" an independent Sinhala weekender praised Kadirgamar for criticizing other Sri Lankan politicians. And under "Hard talk alone won't do" an independent English daily praised Deputy Secretary Armitage's "strong criticisms of LTTE terrorism." End summary.

Headlines

12. Most headlines emphasized the USG's continuing commitment to the peace process. For instance, the independent English daily, ISLAND, reported on the FM's meeting with Armitage under the headline, "Kadir-Armitage pow-wow: U.S. asks LTTE to give up arms," and the government-owned Sinhala daily, DINAMINA, quoted Armitage: "no connections with Tigers until they renounce terrorism." Said the government-owned English DAILY NEWS: "Powell reiterates U.S. support in Govt's quest for peace."

13. Other headlines, however, seemed to have Kadirgamar charting his own course. Items:

- Although Sri Lanka has been designated as "eligible" for the Millennium Challenge Account, headlines in the DAILY NEWS had the FM erroneously talking of a "U.S. 100 M dollar outright grant for development": "nearly U.S. \$100 million will be immediately available to Sri Lanka as a U.S. Millennium Challenge Account, Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar disclosed yesterday."

- Although his government has said the LTTE's ISGA proposals will be a basis for future peace negotiations, Kadirgamar offered his own views in Washington, however. "Kadir sees dangers in ISGA proposals" said the independent English DAILY MIRROR. "ISGA is a blueprint for a separate state, says Kadirgamar in Washington," reported the independent Sinhala daily, LANKADEEPA. Even the government-owned telecaster, RUPAVAHINI, noted: "Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar says that no government could grant everything demanded by the LTTE for an interim administration."

- And in a statement likely to infuriate the LTTE, Kadirgamar wondered aloud whether India would attempt to extradite LTTE leader Prabhakaran. "It's up to the Indian government to get down Prabhakaran," said headlines in the independent Sinhala daily, DIVAINA, while its English sister, ISLAND, said: "Congress may seek Prabhakaran's extradition - Kadir." The independent Sinhala daily, LANKADEEPA, made a similar declaration: "India may ask to hand over Prabhakaran, says Minister Kadirgamar in Washington."

Editorial excerpts:

14. Under the header "Morale-booster from US," the government-owned English DAILY NEWS (5/18) said: "Going by the pronouncements of strong support for Sri Lanka and its peace process, by some top officials of the US Government, it could be said that Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar's visit to the US has been exceedingly successful and productive. It has helped to further bolster our ties with the US. Take for instance the statements made by US Secretary of State Colin Powell and

his deputy Richard Armitage, when they met the Lankan Foreign Minister. There was strong endorsement of the Lankan peace process by these officials who pledged strong support to the UPFA Government in our conflict resolution effort."

15. Under the header "Chaos in a country," an Independent Sinhala weekender, DIVAMINA (5/16): "In a speech made in Washington, 'Democracy implemented in the third world: the Sri Lankan experience,' Minister Kadirgamar said that the two main parties in Sri Lanka are hefty, exhausted, extremely corrupt, and inefficient. That is why so many people voted for JVP this time. Although the masses frequently say this, it's very rarely that a politician makes such a straightforward statement.. Hats off to Minister Kadirgamar for proclaiming this fact in public."

16. Under the header "Hard talk alone won't do," the independent English daily, ISLAND (5/15) said: "... Armitage has been characteristically very strong in his criticisms of LTTE terrorism on Thursday. Speaking to reporters in Washington following his meeting with Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar, he had reiterated that the U.S. will not remove the LTTE from the list of Foreign Terrorist Organisations until the LTTE gives up arms forever. The U.S. had not supported the LTTE in any way nor given any aid to the LTTE, he had said and referred to the tragedy of children being used as child soldiers. He had once again repeated that the LTTE had to give up terrorism by word and deed. Sri Lanka has to appreciate the United States and highly placed American officials like Mr. Armitage who have not minced words about LTTE terrorism and thereby keeping to their commitments against international terrorism. This attitude stands in contrast to the wishy-washy attitudes of countries like Britain and European powers expressing interest in the Sri Lankan issue. Though Britain has banned the LTTE as a terrorist organisation, its spokesman 'Baron Munchausen' Anton Balasingham operates freely from London meeting foreign representatives, making the British capital the operational headquarters of the LTTE. However, despite the harsh anti-terrorist rhetoric of the Superpower, most Sri Lankans are wondering whether such condemnation has had any effect on the terrorists.. There is strong suspicion . that the western powers had drawn up their strategy for the creation of a federal or confederal state which Prabakaran has consented to but that he, in reality, has no other objective than a separate state.. Apparently hard rhetoric has not and will not, deter this fanatical terrorist from deviating from his objective. Something much more effective has to be done to make him see reason and reality.

Lunstead